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FIFTH COMMITTEE
7th meeting
held on
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at 10 a.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 7th MEETING

Chairman:	Mr. DINU	(Romania)
later:	Mr. ZAHID (Vice-Chairman)	(Morocco)
later:	Ms. ROTHEISER (Vice-Chairman)	(Austria)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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* Items considered together.

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The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 106: CURRENT FINANCIAL CRISIS OF THE UNITED NATIONS (continued) (A/46/600 and Add.1-3, A/46/765; A/C.5/47/13)

AGENDA ITEM 107: FINANCIAL EMERGENCY OF THE UNITED NATIONS (continued) (A/46/600 and Add.1-3, A/46/765; A/C.5/47/13)

AGENDA ITEM 124: ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY ASPECTS OF THE FINANCING OF THE UNITED NATIONS PEACE-KEEPING OPERATIONS (continued) (A/47/484)

1. Mr. QAISAR (Pakistan) said that the United Nations needed to take immediate action to encourage Member States to meet their financial obligations under the Charter on time and in full. Unless it resolved the fundamental problem of arrears, it would be financially unable to realize its new potential. Expanding the Working Capital Fund and creating various other funds, as proposed by the Secretary-General in annex I to his report on the financial situation of the United Nations (A/C.5/47/13), might not solve the problem if most of the money continued to come from the same overburdened Member States that had consistently fulfilled their financial obligations.

2. Pakistan agreed in principle with the proposal to create a temporary Peace-keeping Reserve Fund of $50 million and supported the establishment of a revolving peace-keeping reserve fund of $50 million, as proposed in the Secretary-General's Agenda for peace (A/47/277). The recommended increase in the Working Capital Fund, which had declined dramatically over the years as a percentage of authorized appropriations, was all the more necessary in view of the Organization's expanding responsibilities in the area of peace-keeping. With respect to the creation of a United Nations Peace Endowment Fund, while the Fund itself was desirable, the initial target - almost equivalent to the regular budget for one year - was perhaps overambitious. Furthermore, it was important to ensure that contributions to it did not compromise the United Nations in any way.

3. With regard to the proposal to charge interest on the amount of assessed contributions that were not paid on time, he pointed out that some countries were unable to pay on time for technical reasons inherent in their national financial systems. Perhaps interest charges could be applied only to Member States whose arrears remained above a certain percentage of their annual assessment for a year, in the case of the regular budget, or for a biennium, in the case of peace-keeping contributions.

4. The idea of having the General Assembly immediately appropriate one third of the estimated cost of each new peace-keeping operation was workable and would help to ensure timely deployment. The retention of budgetary surpluses,

(Mr. Qaisar, Pakistan)

on the other hand, was acceptable only on a temporary, ad hoc basis. The proposal that the Secretary-General should be authorized to borrow commercially was inadvisable because of the associated interest costs, which, in addition to representing an added financial burden, would be borne by all Members of the Organization, not just those which were late with their payments.

5. With respect to the suggestion that the Secretary-General should be allowed to place contracts without competitive bidding under exceptional circumstances, he would like to know exactly what circumstances might necessitate such action. His delegation wished to reserve comment on the proposals in part C of annex I to the report, since none of them had been elaborated on, with the exception of subparagraph (e), "changes in the formula for calculating the scale of assessments for peace-keeping operations", which was dealt with in document A/47/484. In that connection, he wished to reiterate his delegation's long-standing position that any realistic approach to apportioning the costs of peace-keeping operations should continue to take into account the special responsibility of the permanent members of the Security Council and the fact that the more developed countries should be able to make larger contributions than the less developed ones. In addition, constant efforts were required to make peace-keeping operations more cost-effective.

6. Mr. MARUYAMA (Japan) said that there was no need for his delegation to reiterate its position on the proposals made by the Secretary-General in his report to the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session (A/46/600/Add.1) and further elaborated in his current report (A/C.5/47/13). The time had come for action rather than further discussion.

7. Fortunately, the financial crisis had eased somewhat in the interval between those two reports. The largest contributor was once again paying its assessment in full and the third largest contributor had begun to follow through on its own commitment to pay. Member States had become significantly more responsive to the Organization's rapidly growing need for resources to finance its operations in Cambodia and Yugoslavia, and the cash balance for peace-keeping operations had improved in general. Nevertheless, the financial crisis remained quite real. To date, the United Nations had managed to cope with arrears in the amount of $800 million only by building up a debt to Member States of roughly equivalent size.

8. Japan was deeply concerned by the unhealthy practice of internal borrowing to provide a de facto buffer reserve fund for rapidly growing peace-keeping operations. Since the level of resources in the regular budget had remained fairly constant, in order to improve cash management, part of the arrears that were paid into the General Fund (regular budget) should be used to constitute a future reserve fund for the start-up of peace-keeping operations.

(Mr. Maruyama, Japan)

9. Given the current proportion of expenditures on peace-keeping operations to total expenditures, those operations had a tremendous impact on the financial management of the Organization. Since it was impossible to predict when peace-keeping operations would need to be launched and how big they would need to be, Member States could not be expected to allocate resources for them far in advance. Moreover, while Member States might be able to make progress in reducing their arrears, the problem of delayed payment had more to do with their financial and fiscal systems than with their willingness to pay.

10. The solution must be institutional. Agreement must be reached at the current session on expanding the reserve funds for start-up activities, not only because a more serious financial shortfall was expected after December 1992, but also because long-term projections suggested that the financial requirements of peace-keeping operations would continue to grow.

11. His delegation intended to submit a draft resolution with a view to ensuring that the financial requirements for the start-up of peace-keeping operations could be met without any new financial burden being imposed on Member States. Japan's proposal would involve the establishment, within the Working Capital Fund, of a new component for peace-keeping operations in the amount of $150 million. That component would be secured by crediting to it the amount realized through the application of payments of arrears and those amounts which were retained pursuant to the suspension of the Financial Regulations in respect of the regular budget, and by transferring to it the savings arising from the liquidation of obligations, together with interest and miscellaneous income from the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) and the United Nations Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIIMOG). The regular budget might also have access to the funds made available under that component. Adoption of such a proposal would increase the funds available for the start-up of operations.

12. The Committee should also develop a comprehensive policy for the mobilization and management of the financial, human and material resources needed for peace-keeping operations, with due regard for maximum efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Such an approach would include the reorganization of the appropriate Secretariat units so as to improve planning and coordination; the development of a means of mobilizing and managing resources and equipment from interested States; a strengthening of the procedures relating to peace-keeping budgets, including the issuance of assessment letters; the preparation of accurate estimates and evaluations of expenditures, and the disposal of any surpluses; a review of the practice of using regular staff members for mission posts and of the function of the Support Account for Peace-Keeping Operations; improvement of the practices relating to the calculation of expenditures incurred by the Organization in peace-keeping operations; and reconsideration of the policy relating to the reserve stock of equipment and supply items for peace-keeping operations. The adoption of such measures would improve accountability and credibility and encourage Member States to pay assessments in full and on time.

(Mr. Maruyama, Japan)

13. With regard to the Secretary-General's proposals that one third of the estimated cost of any new operation should be appropriated at the outset and that some contracts might be entered into without competitive bidding, his delegation would prefer not to consider other measures until the issues it had raised had been addressed.

14. Mr. Zahid (Morocco), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

15. Mr. CHEW (Singapore) said that his country, which had always supported and contributed to United Nations peace-keeping operations, agreed that the Organization should continue to streamline and refine its methodology for apportioning the costs of peace-keeping operations financed through assessed contributions. The original method of apportioning those costs, described in paragraph 2 of the Secretary-General's report on that subject (A/47/484), had divided the Member States into four groups based primarily on their capacity to pay, the main criterion being national income. In order to correct perceived anomalies in the old method, the Secretary-General now proposed that per capita national income might be used as a criterion. His delegation believed the inequities that would be introduced by the new method would dwarf any anomalies perceived in the old one. National income had originally been chosen because it was the most equitable criterion available. The proposed new criterion was inherently biased against the less populated countries. All of the 10 Member States that would be affected by the proposal had small populations and relatively little international influence. Moreover, the cut-off figure of $5,000 beyond which a country would be moved from group (c) to group (b) appeared entirely arbitrary. Lastly, although one of the main aims of the proposed change was supposedly to ease the financial burdens on groups (c) and (d) (the less developed and the least developed States), the actual result would be to decrease the amount paid by groups (a) and (b) (the permanent members of the Security Council and the developed countries). The only group to suffer an increase would be group (c).

16. If the new method was implemented as described, it would only confirm the existing perception of discrimination against small and less developed States. Small States were already proportionally underrepresented in the principal organs of the United Nations and on the governing councils and boards of its specialized agencies. They were also poorly represented in the Organization's higher echelons and professional ranks. For that and the other reasons he had mentioned, his delegation could not accept the proposed change. Until a more equitable proposal could be formulated, it believed that the present system for the apportionment of costs should be retained.

17. Mr. PENEV (Bulgaria) said that there was a clear link between the efforts to enable the United Nations to meet present-day challenges more effectively and the need to enhance its financial capacity. He agreed with the Secretary-General that the precarious financial situation was due basically to the failure of Member States to pay their assessed contributions in full and on time. Despite a difficult period of economic transition, his own country

(Mr. Penev, Bulgaria)

had met its obligations to the regular budget in full, thereby demonstrating the priority it attached to United Nations activities. In order to tackle the root causes of the grave and persistent financial crisis, it was essential to focus on three points. First, full advantage should be taken of the opportunities provided by the new budgetary process so that all Member States would feel a sense of responsibility for meeting their financial commitments. Second, Member States must be made more aware that the Organization's activities responded to their fundamental needs, while the Secretariat should strive for increased cost-efficiency and accountability. Third, the current mechanism for the collection of assessed contributions needed to be reviewed. Because of the inflexibility of national budgetary procedures, the one-month deadline for meeting financial obligations frequently posed problems. He welcomed the suggestion made by the representative of Canada that the date for the payment of contributions need not necessarily coincide with the beginning of the calendar year. An alternative option used in other international bodies would be to have contributions paid in two separate instalments. Any such changes should not, however, disrupt the Organization's activities and he would welcome the Secretariat's views on the matter.

18. He welcomed the proposals put forward by the Secretary-General with a view to resolving the problem of non-payment, but agreed with the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) that they needed further refinement, particularly the proposal that interest should be charged on outstanding contributions, which needed to be viewed in a broader context if it was to achieve its desired effect. Consideration should also be given to the valuable ideas put forward in the working group which had examined the question of establishing incentives to pay. An increase in the Working Capital Fund was needed, but should not be seen as a means of offsetting the high level of unpaid contributions. It was more important to consider how effective it would be in solving the problem of the lack of reserves.

19. The importance of peace-keeping operations was highlighted by the fact that the current year's assessments for such operations exceeded the amount assessed under the regular budget. The main problems were the failure of Member States to pay their contributions on time, the need for timely and adequate financing during the start-up period, and the difficulties in reimbursing troop-contributing countries. The Secretary-General's proposal regarding the establishment of a revolving peace-keeping reserve fund to meet the start-up costs of operations was welcome and should provide a long-term solution. His delegation would also support an arrangement for the allocation of a fixed percentage of the defence budgets of Member States for the financing of peace-keeping activities, since there was no question that peace-keeping also made a significant contribution to national efforts to achieve security and stability. The failure of Member States to pay their contributions on time in turn affected the Organization's ability to reimburse troop-contributing countries and thus placed an additional burden on those States and undermined their willingness to continue to support peace-keeping operations. The present "hand-to-mouth" pattern of reimbursement should be

(Mr. Peney, Bulgaria)

replaced by a mechanism for timely and smooth reimbursement of peace-keeping services, which would function independently of the payment of contributions. The proposed reserve fund would offer a partial solution; any experience gained thereby could be useful in devising a comprehensive reimbursement mechanism.

20. A related problem was the imposition of mandatory sanctions under Article 41 of the Charter. In view of the increasing use of such sanctions, they should be regarded as a comprehensive United Nations operation with an integrated budget, in order to help Member States to alleviate any economic burdens resulting from the observance of sanctions.

21. Mr. Dinu (Romania) resumed the Chair.

22. Mr. RICHARDSON (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Community and its member States, said that the origin of the persistent financial difficulties of the United Nations lay in the withholding of assessed contributions. Certain States which did not hesitate to call on the good offices of the Organization were at the same time willing to allow its financial situation to deteriorate. Those States seemed to trust that the Organization would always be financed by the States that met their obligations fully, promptly and unconditionally. The latter included the States members of the European Community, which accounted for over 30 per cent of assessed contributions, a figure which would be even higher if account were taken of payments actually made and of the substantial efforts made by those members of the Community which contributed troops. The only answer to the current financial situation was for all Member States to pay their assessed contributions promptly and in full, in accordance with their legal obligations under the Charter.

23. While he welcomed the information contained in the reports of the Secretary-General (A/C.5/47/13 and A/46/600 and Add.1-3), he was concerned about the way in which the figures for outstanding contributions were presented. It was inappropriate to qualify contributions as outstanding when they were not yet so under the terms of financial regulation 5.4. A distinction should be drawn between contributions which had been outstanding for less than one year and those which had been outstanding for longer. In many cases, moreover, it was the Organization that owed money to Member States.

24. The various proposals put forward for easing the financial crisis, such as commercial borrowing, taxes on trade and services and even a lottery, were all open to the objection that they would increase the burden on those Member States that did take their obligations seriously, without offering any guarantee that the performance of others would improve. The Twelve had supported the repeated suspension of financial regulations 4.3, 4.4 and 5.2 on a case-by-case basis to ensure the continued functioning of the United Nations, but the practice could not be continued indefinitely.

(Mr. Richardson, United Kingdom)

25. None of the various schemes considered would actually be necessary if all Member States paid their assessed contributions in full. It was time to consider introducing specific incentives; the Twelve were ready to enter into informal consultations on the matter, drawing on the experience of other organizations within the system. They also felt that the Financial Regulations did not adequately reflect the interests of States which paid promptly and in full.

26. The same need for prompt and full payment of assessed contributions applied to peace-keeping operations. He was concerned at the regularity with which appropriations exceeded actual expenditure in peace-keeping accounts, even after the reductions recommended by ACABQ. He would welcome further comments from the Secretariat and any additional information from the Chairman of the Advisory Committee regarding its practice in examining the budgets of peace-keeping operations, as their number and complexity increased.

27. Peace-keeping requirements were frequently unforeseen and the capacity to respond rapidly depended in the short term on the availability of financial resources. The Committee should therefore consider the specific proposals put forward by the Secretary-General in his report entitled "An Agenda for peace" (A/47/277). The European Community supported the establishment of a peace-keeping reserve fund, subject to negotiation on the details. In that connection, he recalled the view expressed by ACABQ that a prior policy decision was required on the financing of such a fund. Moreover, account should be taken of the interests of those Member States which had fulfilled their obligations.

28. Mr. AYEWAH (Nigeria) said that Member States must fulfil their financial obligations to the Organization, if they wanted it to meet their growing expectations. While sympathizing with the Secretary-General's view that the financial crisis was due largely to the failure of Member States to pay their assessed contributions in full and on time, he felt bound to point out that the worsening economic situation of most developing countries was also responsible for their late payments. A further factor was the unilateral decision by some Member States to withhold their payments in order to compel the Organization to conduct itself in accordance with their special interests. The United Nations belonged to its entire membership and all Member States had a duty to ensure that it was viable and solvent.

29. His delegation could not, however, agree with the Secretary-General's proposal to impose interest charges as a penalty for late payment, since it would place a further burden on those States which had been unable to pay their initial assessment. He also opposed the proposal to allow commercial borrowing in order to obtain temporary relief, since it would not only impose the additional burden of interest payments on Member States but would also jeopardize the prestige and independence of the Organization. Other cost-saving measures should therefore be explored, such as financial prudence and improved coordination of activities at all levels within the United Nations system.

(Mr. Ayewah, Nigeria)

30. He welcomed the proposal regarding the establishment of a peace-keeping reserve fund to facilitate the start-up costs of new operations and agreed with the Secretary-General that it could be established from the unencumbered balance from operations already concluded. In his view, there was no need for a further increase in the Working Capital Fund since it would impose an additional burden on Member States. He agreed with the ACABQ that the establishment of a peace endowment fund required a prior policy decision by the General Assembly. If, however, the major contributors paid their assessments on time, there would be no need for special funds. His own country would continue to do its best to pay its assessed contribution on time despite its declining economy, and he urged all States which were in arrears to fulfil their obligations both to the regular budget and to peace-keeping operations.

31. While he would support any reasonable measure to widen the financial base, he could not accept any proposals that advocated zero growth as a principle to be applied to the United Nations budget. Given the current socio-economic situation in developing countries, particularly in Africa, any cuts in important United Nations economic and social programmes for those countries would have a direct impact on their development

32. The Secretary-General should continue to urge Member States to pay their assessed contributions in full or in part and should continue to keep Member States regularly informed of the financial position of the Organization.

33. His country was aware of the importance of peace-keeping in maintaining international peace and security and had taken part in nearly all the peace-keeping operations since joining the United Nations in 1960. It was therefore seriously concerned at the way in which unpaid arrears of assessed contributions were increasing the debt owed to troop-contributing countries, which might be dissuaded by domestic pressures from meeting requests for future operations.

34. Ms. Rotheiser (Austria), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

35. Mr. DANKWA (Ghana) said that the Secretary-General's proposals for dealing with the financial situation of the United Nations demanded an appropriate response from the Committee. Those proposals not only reflected a legitimate concern about the precarious and inadequate financing of the Organization's activities, but also called in question the political commitment of Member States. As the Secretary-General had put it in his "Agenda for peace": "Our vision cannot really extend to the prospect opening before us, as long as our financing remains myopic" (A/47/277, para. 69).

36. In his delegation's view, non-payment and late payment were the two main issues that should be addressed by any proposals to remedy the financial situation. According to the Secretary-General's most recent report (A/C.5/47/13), payments of assessed contributions to the regular budget had

(Mr. Dankwa, Ghana)

fallen from 72.1 per cent in 1985 to 61 per cent in 1991. The fact that less than 100 per cent of assessed contributions was paid could result in either over-budgeting or the non-implementation of certain programmes. Over-budgeting imposed unnecessary burdens on Member States and corrective measures to lighten that burden might induce more Member States to pay. The non-implementation of certain programmes because of insufficient funding, on the other hand, violated the spirit of the programme budget. It might also indicate an underutilization of staff resources.

37. Under financial regulation 5.4, Member States were required to pay their assessed contributions within 30 days of the receipt of notification. Any contribution not paid after the 30 days was outstanding. In recent years, his delegation had begun to wonder whether it might not be politically advantageous for a Member State, particularly a major contributor, to pay all or part of its contribution just as the regular budget and assessed peace-keeping operations were about to run out of money. The publicity won by such late payments was a disincentive to full compliance with regulation 5.4.

38. His delegation was gratified that, by 30 September 1992, more Member States had paid their regular budget contributions than at the same date in 1991 or 1990. The improvement was not very noticeable because of the failure to pay of the third largest contributor. His delegation believed that every Member State, whether it was a major or a minor contributor, should discharge its financial obligations.

39. His delegation fully appreciated the need to secure full funding at the beginning of the programme budget year in order to allow for the full and timely implementation of all programmes, but it had learned from experience that it was unrealistic to expect all Member States, at differing distances from Headquarters and operating under different bureaucratic regimes, to be able to comply with regulation 5.4. A law that did not command general respect was as unhelpful as no law. Regulation 5.4 should be reviewed to bring it into line with reality, if it was to attract compliance by the full membership.

40. The test of the various proposals set forth in the Secretary-General's report (A/C.5/47/13) should be the effect of each on the cash-flow situation of the Secretariat and its implications for the Organization as a whole. With regard to the proposal to charge interest, his delegation doubted that there would be any positive effect on the cash-flow situation. It was even likely that more Member States might not pay. It would certainly add to the burdens of those Member States which paid in full but did so late because of their national financial regulations. Moreover, the Organization had no capacity to enforce the interest charge. His delegation therefore found the proposal unrealistic.

41. His delegation was also opposed to the proposal regarding the suspension of certain financial regulations to permit the retention of budgetary

(Mr. Dankwa, Ghana)

surpluses. Financial discipline required such decisions to be taken on a case-by-case basis, as had been the practice in the General Assembly in recent years. Permanent suspension would introduce complications into the new budgetary process.

42. The proposal that the Secretary-General should be authorized to borrow commercially would obviously improve the cash-flow situation, but the legal, budgetary and other implications made it unattractive.

43. The four proposals made in regard to various funds merited careful and serious consideration since they sought to address the liquidity problem directly. The proposal regarding the establishment of a Peace Endowment Fund was related to one of the concerns raised by the Secretary-General in his "Agenda for peace", namely, the Organization's ability to function over the longer term. In principle, his delegation had no objection to the proposal but felt that its success would be related to the Organization's ability to address immediate requirements. The establishment of a temporary Peace-keeping Reserve Fund had essentially the same purpose: to address the problem of start-up costs.

44. His delegation did not believe that separate funds should be established for peace-keeping operations. Instead, the Working Capital Fund should be increased to serve the requirements of both the regular budget and peace-keeping operations. Both should be able to borrow from the Working Capital Fund as and when necessary. His delegation therefore supported the proposal for a substantial increase in the Working Capital Fund. The level of the Fund, however, should not be tied entirely to the level of the budget. His delegation proposed that the Fund should consist of 25 per cent of the regular budget, for which Member States would be assessed, plus voluntary contributions from individuals and corporations. It would be a revolving fund, replenished from the repayments of borrowers.

45. No proposal would absolve Member States from their collective responsibility under Article 17 of the Charter. His delegation felt, however, that the Secretary-General should be authorized to enter into bilateral consultations with Member States whose contributions were outstanding in order to arrive at a flexible timetable whereby such countries could pay off their arrears in monthly instalments over a period of five years. The same flexibility should apply to payments of current contributions: Member States whose pattern of payment pointed to serious difficulties should be allowed to pay in monthly instalments with full payment made within the financial year. Such flexibility would only work, however, if and when those countries whose capacity to pay was never in doubt paid their contributions in full and on time, and if the Working Capital Fund was substantially increased.

46. Ghana welcomed the increased demands made by Member States on the Organization. High expectations meant that the Organization was better poised to work towards the achievement of all the purposes of the Charter, including

(Mr. Dankwa, Ghana)

international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character. His delegation could not, however, associate itself with any proposal that would in effect release those States which had not paid their contributions from their obligation and increase the burden on those which had faithfully discharged their obligations to the Organization. Member States should resolve to reaffirm their commitment to their collective responsibility, not only in words but in deeds.

47. Mr. SENGWE (Zimbabwe) said that the increasing demands placed on the Organization were not being matched by increased resources. In fact, because States were not paying their dues in full and on time, the Organization was having to dig deep into its meagre reserves in order to meet its expenses and was running out of cash. Only a third of the membership had paid their assessed contributions, and unpaid contributions to the regular budget stood at some $826 million, a large percentage of which was owed by permanent members of the Security Council. That special status of permanent member carried special responsibilities and obligations. In addition, unpaid assessed contributions for current peace-keeping operations totalled $644 million. The net result was that the Organization's credibility was undermined and its ability to respond to crises curtailed. The situation must not continue. Member States must pay their assessed contributions in full and on time. Despite the economic difficulties it was experiencing, Zimbabwe continued to do so.

48. His delegation supported the proposal that interest should be charged on unpaid contributions, as well as the proposed increase in the Working Capital Fund. However, the proposal to authorize commercial borrowing would increase rather than diminish the financial problems of the Organization.

49. Peace-keeping operations had increased significantly since 1987, 13 having been established in the past five years alone. Given the increasing demand for and the unpredictability of such operations, his delegation supported the proposal regarding the establishment of a revolving Peace-keeping Reserve Fund at a level of $50 million, to be used as a start-up fund. The Secretary-General must be given adequate resources to respond in times of crisis. His delegation also supported the proposal that one third of the estimated cost of each operation should be appropriated by the General Assembly as soon as a decision was taken to establish it. The proposal to forgo competitive bidding in some circumstances required further study.

50. That the United Nations required a stable financial basis was not debatable. It was clear that unless a lasting solution was found the Organization would find it difficult to implement the programmes mandated by the General Assembly. The onus was on Member States to pay their dues in full and on time.

51. Mr. Dinu (Romania) resumed the Chair.

52. Mr. MONGBE (Benin) said that the urgency of the situation had prompted the Secretary-General to put forward some bold proposals for dealing with the long-standing financial crisis. However, the proposal that interest should be charged on the amounts of assessed contributions that were not paid on time, although attractive, was not realistic. The late payment of contributions was not always the result of a lack of willingness on the part of States but was due rather to economic and financial difficulties. That was the case, for example, with many of the least developed countries and others which faced enormous budgetary difficulties because of natural disasters or armed conflict. While his delegation urged all such States to make an effort to honour their commitments, it did not feel that they should be charged the kind of penalty that might reasonably be applied to wealthier States.

53. The United Nations was a political organization and could not be run like a private enterprise. The matter should be studied further before any decision was taken. In his delegation's opinion, Article 19 of the Charter, which took the political nature of the Organization fully into account, was sufficient, although the Secretary-General might also approach the States in default.

54. He did not wish to give the impression that his delegation was trying to start from scratch again in the search for a solution; on the contrary, it wished to appeal to each State's conscience in order to breathe new life into the United Nations, which, with the ending of the cold war, had become what it should have been from the start - an institution for the establishment and maintenance of peace. Recognition of the importance of the role that the Organization should play implied the acceptance of new financial burdens. That could only be achieved if States were prepared to abide by their political, moral and financial commitments.

55. His delegation endorsed the Secretary-General's suggestion regarding a levy on arms sales, which would have the double advantage of providing the United Nations with useful resources and discouraging massive arms sales. Such a levy would, of course, require cooperation and political will on the part of both buyers and sellers.

56. Benin had no objection to the proposed Humanitarian Revolving Fund of $50 million. It hoped, however, that it would be subject to the rules whereby the General Assembly was required to authorize expenditures in advance. That would ensure transparency and avoid any suspicion of financial mismanagement. His delegation strongly supported the proposal regarding an increase in the Working Capital Fund to a level of $250 million, as well as the proposal concerning the suspension of certain financial regulations to permit the retention of budgetary surpluses, which could be used for peace-keeping operations pending the receipt of assessed contributions.

57. Although Benin was one of the least developed countries, and had limited resources, it had recently made great efforts and paid off 70 per cent of its debt to the regular budget; it was, moreover, taking steps to clear the rest

(Mr. Mongbe, Benin)

of its debt as soon as possible. His Government was well aware of the heavy demands made on the Organization, particularly with regard to peacemaking and peace-keeping and, to promote sustainable development, and it commended those States which were already up to date with their contributions. His delegation was ready to participate in any consultations that might be organized on the financial crisis and the financing of peace-keeping operations.

58. Mr. ELARABY (Egypt) said that the financial situation of the Organization had worsened in recent months, owing in particular to the initiation or expansion of peace-keeping operations, and noted the Secretary-General's warning that it might not be possible to maintain the Organization's operations unless Member States acted promptly to provide the necessary resources. It was a well-known fact that the deplorable financial situation was due to the failure on the part of a number of Member States to meet their statutory obligations under the Charter. It was unacceptable that unpaid contributions to the regular budget stood at some $826 million, an amount equivalent to 80 per cent of the regular budget assessment for 1992. With only two months left in the year, nearly two thirds of the Member States had not paid their assessments in full. His delegation noted that the efforts by the Secretary-General and his predecessor to remind Member States to pay contributions had failed to produce positive results. It was incumbent upon Member States to meet their obligations towards the Organization.

59. His delegation welcomed the new proposals put forward by the Secretary-General with a view to building a stronger financial base, and expected the debate in the Fifth Committee to lead to the adoption of adequate decisions that would end the crisis. The problem was of the utmost urgency if the Organization was to serve as the central point in the post-cold-war world order. Sound finances were a vital precondition for the effective implementation of all programmes and activities.

60. Peace-keeping operations represented the most costly programme ever undertaken by the Organization, accounting for some $2.5 billion in 1992 alone. Ten of the current peace-keeping operations were funded under the peace-keeping assessment formula and it was estimated that approximately $1 billion was needed for the next six-month period. During 1992, there had been a need for continued borrowing from peace-keeping accounts in order to meet current cash flow requirements for regular budget activities. That situation was alarming.

61. The Secretary-General's proposal regarding the establishment of a revolving peace-keeping reserve fund for the start-up of peace-keeping operations was a practical suggestion. The Organization should be ready to act whenever action was needed. The existence of a reserve fund would help to prevent many conflicts since peace-keeping missions could be dispatched as soon as - or, indeed, before - a conflict erupted. His Government also supported the proposal regarding the establishment of a Peace Endowment Fund of $1 billion.

(Mr. Elaraby, Egypt)

62. With regard to the Organization's expanding role in humanitarian assistance, a complementary central funding mechanism was needed for the initial phase of emergencies. His delegation endorsed the proposal in General Assembly resolution 46/182 regarding the creation of a humanitarian revolving fund in the order of $50 million, to be financed by voluntary contributions. Such a fund would help the Organization to respond rapidly in the event of an emergency. His delegation also supported the proposal in the report entitled "An Agenda for peace" (A/47/277) that the General Assembly should appropriate one third of the estimated cost of each new peace-keeping operation as soon as a decision had been taken to establish it. Lastly, he noted with interest the establishment of a high-level group to examine the financing of the United Nations and he looked forward to discussing its conclusions later in the session.

63. The United Nations was at a crossroads and collective action was needed to make it more efficient and responsive to current needs.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.

UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FORTY-SEVENTH SESSION

Official Records

FIFTH COMMITTEE
8th meeting
held on
Friday, 16 October 1992
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 8th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. DINU (Romania)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 106: CURRENT FINANCIAL CRISIS OF THE UNITED NATIONS (continued) (A/46/600 and Add.1-3, A/46/765; A/C.5/47/13)

AGENDA ITEM 107: FINANCIAL EMERGENCY OF THE UNITED NATIONS (continued) (A/46/600 and Add.1-3, A/46/765; A/C.5/47/13)

AGENDA ITEM 124: ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY ASPECTS OF THE FINANCING OF THE UNITED NATIONS PEACE-KEEPING OPERATIONS (continued) (A/46/600 and Add.1-3, A/46/765; A/C.5/47/13)

1. Mr. GHAREKHAN (India) said that his delegation had carefully considered the documents available under agenda items 106 and 107 but noted that there were other documents, in particular the report of the Secretary-General, entitled "An agenda for peace" (A/47/277-S/24111), which were the subject of discussion and deliberation in the concerned intergovernmental bodies. The outcome of those consultations would have an impact on the work of the Fifth Committee. In that context, two high-level groups were addressing that issue, one chaired by the Ambassador of Barbados and the other functioning under the auspices of the Ford Foundation. The recommendations of those groups would clearly have a bearing on the Committee's deliberations. The views of his delegation should therefore be considered preliminary, and India reserved the right to revert to the matter once additional documentation and information became available.

2. The financial situation of the Organization could be considered at various levels. It was possible to take the view that there was no real crisis or emergency, since those items had been on the agenda of the General Assembly for several years and, nevertheless, the Organization appeared to have managed to stay afloat financially. However, the Organization had lived from hand to mouth and on the verge of bankruptcy for far too long, and the time had come to place it on a firm and sound financial footing. As the Organization's chief administrative officer, the Secretary-General was fully within his rights to draw the Assembly's attention, year after year, to the problems that he faced in discharging his mandates, if the situation was not resolved.

3. In order to propose solutions to the problem, it was necessary to examine the underlying causes and the nature of the crisis. In recent years, the magnitude and scale of the Organization's operations and activities, particularly in the field of peace-keeping, had grown significantly, and there had been a concomitant increase in resource requirements. At the same time, the payments situation had remained unchanged or had even worsened, which had escalated financial difficulties. The situation was particularly difficult in the third quarter of each year.

(Mr. Gharekhan, India)

4. If Member States fulfilled their financial obligations in full and on time, the financial crisis would disappear. There could be several reasons for non-payment or delayed payment of obligatory dues. In the past, Member States were told that the Organization, mainly as a result of the cold war, was ineffective and inefficient, that it had a bloated bureaucracy, that it was not financially prudent and that it was therefore necessary to withhold funds in order to bring about reform and revitalization. General Assembly resolution 41/213 represented an important landmark in the process of reform, and the situation was currently entirely different. The demise of the cold war had resulted in an exponential increase in the work of the Organization, which had become an active and effective structure to the point of being, as some might say, interventionist. The faith of the international community in the Organization and its effectiveness had grown significantly. One of the first actions of the new Secretary-General was to restructure and revamp the Secretariat by, inter alia, streamlining the bureaucracy and organizational structures and initiating measures to enhance staff productivity.

5. Why, then, did the financial crisis continue? It was to be hoped that the non-payment of contributions was not due to States' unwillingness to pay but to economic difficulties, which affected developing countries and even some of the major contributors. Perhaps it was also necessary to take account of the fact that financial years in different countries might not coincide with the financial year of the United Nations, which could result in some delay. While those problems must be addressed, the bottom line was that Member States must fulfil their financial obligations.

6. The Secretary-General had made a number of proposals to solve the Organization's financial problems. Of the cluster of proposals relating to the financing of peace-keeping operations, India supported the establishment of a revolving Peace-keeping Reserve Fund to finance initial start-up costs of new peace-keeping operations. The technical details relating to activities to be financed from that Fund and the nature of initial financing of the Fund would, naturally, have to be worked out.

7. While the establishment of the United Nations Peace Endowment Fund was a novel idea, his delegation was not convinced of the viability of that proposal or of the suggestion that funds should be raised from commercial and private sources.

8. The proposal for automatic appropriation of one third of the estimated cost of every new peace-keeping operation should be examined very carefully, especially with regard to the requirement of financial discipline and in view of the fact that it involved the authority of the General Assembly and the Security Council in budgetary and financial matters. The establishment of the Peace-keeping Reserve Fund would make such a mechanism unnecessary.

9. No substantive justification had been provided for the idea of changing the formula for calculating the scale of assessments for peace-keeping

(Mr. Gharekhan, India)

operations. Since that matter was the subject of a related report of the Secretary-General, the Committee would have an opportunity to revert to it later in the session.

10. His delegation was willing to consider favourably the proposals to charge interest on unpaid assessed contributions and to increase the Working Capital Fund which, in spite of increases in the Organization's activities and the biennial budget, had remained at the level of US$ 100 million for several years.

11. The General Assembly had repeatedly considered the proposal to borrow on commercial or concessional terms but had never found the idea acceptable. One reason was that the United Nations was not a profit- or income-generating organization and hence had no source for repayment of its debt obligations other than by increasing the contributions of Member States.

12. The idea of a levy on arms sales and on international air travel were interesting and required a more detailed presentation by the Secretariat than was contained in the report.

13. In conclusion, his delegation supported the proposals to establish a Peace-keeping Reserve Fund and to increase the size of the Working Capital Fund. In the long run, however, the only lasting solution to the Organization's financial problems was the prompt payment of dues by Member States.

14. Mr. OULD MOHAMED MOHMOUD (Mauritania), speaking on behalf of the States members of the Arab Maghreb Union, said that, in spite of the current renaissance of the United Nations and the unprecedented demands being made on it in the areas of peace-keeping and international security as well as economic and social development, the Organization was still suffering very serious financial hardship that imperilled its credibility and effectiveness. The main reason for that precarious financial situation, which had been dragging on for some years, was the late payment of assessed contributions for the regular budget and for peace-keeping operations. If the United Nations was to be able to fulfil its usual tasks and also take on new responsibilities, Member States would have to make available to it adequate financial resources.

15. The States members of the Arab Maghreb Union wish to reiterate their commitment to the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations and undertook to spare no effort to help fulfil its financial obligations, taking into account the economic situation and national budgetary procedures of their respective countries, since they were convinced that the continuation of the Organization's work was wholly dependent on the availability of adequate financial resources.

(Mr. Ould Mohamed Mohmoud, Mauritania)

16. In order to find lasting solutions to the financial crisis, the Secretary-General had put forward a set of proposals and had appointed a group of eminent persons to study the matter and make recommendations. It would have been beneficial to have the contribution of that group of experts in studying the financial crisis of the United Nations, since their recommendations and proposals would have been very useful. Since that input was lacking, the Arab Maghreb Union would confine itself to making a few comments on the Secretary-General's proposals.

17. With regard to the proposal for increasing the Working Capital Fund, the Arab Maghreb Union shared the opinion of the Advisory Committee that the Working Capital Fund was a mechanism designed to guarantee an orderly flow of cash and that any increase in its size should be regarded as a purely technical consequence of the increase of the United Nations budget and not as a partial solution to the Organization's financial crisis.

18. With respect to the proposal that certain norms of the United Nations Financial Regulations should be suspended so as to allow retention of budgetary surpluses, the States members of the Arab Maghreb Union shared the consensus view that the retention of such surpluses could be considered as a temporary measure and that the surpluses would have to be reimbursed to Member States as soon as the financial situation of the Organization permitted.

19. The creation of a Peace-keeping Reserve Fund was a very good proposal that could facilitate the initiation of peace-keeping operations. Its financing should be reviewed in the light of the economic and financial situation of developing countries.

20. The States members of the Arab Maghreb Union noted that the proposal for taking out loans from lending institutions or from the World Bank would involve the payment of interest and would, consequently, impose new financial burdens on Member States, whose obligations were already heavy, particularly in the case of the developing countries group, to which the States members of the Union belonged.

21. The delegations of the States members of the Arab Maghreb Union would take up the Secretary-General's proposals again once the recommendations of the group of experts to examine the financial situation of the United Nations were known. Also, they wished to emphasize that, although the financial viability of the United Nations was a collective responsibility of all Member States, in examining the question of the financing of the Organization's activities the economic plight of the developing countries, and especially of certain of them, should be kept in mind. That in no way diminished the Arab Maghreb Union countries' commitment to the purposes of the United Nations or to its aspiration to establish a fair and equitable new international order.

AGENDA ITEM 102: FINANCIAL REPORTS AND AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS, AND REPORTS OF THE BOARD OF AUDITORS (continued) (A/47/5 and Corr.1, vols. I, II and III, and Add.1 to 3, Add.4 and Corr.1, Add.5 to 7 and Add.8 and Corr.1, A/47/315, A/47/460, A/47/500 and A/47/510)

22. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that the Advisory Committee had no comments on the reports of the Secretary-General in documents A/47/460 and A/47/510.

AGENDA ITEM 110: PATTERN OF CONFERENCES (continued) (A/47/7/Add.1, A/47/32, A/47/287, A/47/336; A/C.5/47/1)

23. Ms. ROTHEISER (Austria) said that her delegation, being a member of the Committee on Conferences, supported all the recommendations of the Committee (A/47/32).

24. One of the main issues considered by the Committee was compliance with the six-week rule for the issuance of pre-session documentation. Although that rule was hardly ever respected, it would be too simple to lay the blame for that situation solely on the Office of Conference Services. The causes of that deep-rooted problem were manifold. On the one hand, Member States often asked for unnecessary studies or reports when seeking a compromise solution. On the other hand, the various departments often submitted poor-quality reports or submitted them late. Some delays arose in the Office of Conference Services itself, which had to issue an increasing number of reports with reduced means. Its workload had gone up by 10 per cent due to increased Security Council activity, while the number of its staff had been reduced by the same percentage. Nevertheless, it was surprising to learn that the six-week rule was not even considered when deciding which documents were to be translated on a priority basis. Obviously, there was a serious problem that would have to be tackled from various angles; the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences offered a good starting-point.

25. The introduction of new technology might be the key to solving certain problems, as was indicated in the report of the Secretary-General on the Office of Conference Services (A/47/336). However, the speed at which new technology was being introduced, as foreseen in the medium-term plan for 1992-1997, seemed limited both in scope and as far as duty stations were concerned. A more rapid introduction of new technology would ensure more efficient and - in the long run - more cost-effective conference services. It would be worth while if productivity gains from the introduction of new technology could be quantified.

26. With respect to the installation of a signalling system whenever a speech time-limit was established, her delegation supported the concept of establishing time-limits, since time and resources could be saved if statements were concise. At the same time, too rigid an application of time-limits could render simultaneous interpretation impossible because of too rapid a delivery of statements.

(Ms. Rotheiser, Austria)

27. In the matter of planning of meetings and conferences, although the planning function of the Secretariat had constantly been enhanced over the years, there was room for improvement. Meetings and conferences should be spread more evenly throughout the year and the entire system so as to allow optimum utilization of conference services. In that context, her delegation especially supported the recommended change of date of the twenty-sixth session of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law in order to avoid an overlap with the World Conference on Human Rights.

28. Improved planning would ensure a more efficient use of conference resources. That improved planning, however, was not the sole responsibility of Member States, but also of the bureaux of the various bodies. Her delegation explicitly supported the recommendation of the Committee on Conferences that the cost per hour of meeting time should be brought to the attention of the members of all United Nations organs.

29. Mr. BENNETT (United States of America) said that, as in previous years, the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/47/32) failed to provide significant recommendations, a fact which was regrettable but indicative of the declining effectiveness of that body in fulfilling its responsibiliy for overseeing the Organization's largest programme.

30. The Committee was not solely responsible for that state of affairs. The General Assembly had adopted measures to limit the authority of the Committee, despite recommendations by the Group of 18 designed to strengthen its role. Other United Nations bodies ignored many of the established rules and regulations governing conference services and generally failed to respond to requests by the Committee and the General Assembly to limit the use of such services. The effort to restructure the intergovernmental decision-making process in the economic and social areas, as recommended by the Group of 18, was an excellent example of the lack of progress in reducing spending on conference services.

31. At its forty-sixth session, the General Assembly had asked all intergovernmental bodies to take steps to improve the utilization of conference services. The measures taken were to be reported to the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences and analysed by the Secretariat. The Committee on Conferences had not received a report on the matter. He would like to know what steps the Secretariat had taken to implement the directive in question and whether any replies had been received. The General Assembly should renew its appeal and insist that the Secretariat, the chairmen of all intergovernmental bodies and the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences should take immediate action to reduce conference-servicing requirements.

32. It was disappointing that the governing bodies of UNDP, UNICEF and UNHCR had made no serious effort to reduce their conference-servicing requirements and had ignored the appeals made by the General Assembly in that regard.

(Mr. Bennett, United States)

33. It was also disappointing that the Committee on Conferences had failed to agree on the biennialization of its meetings. Given the limited impact of its current work, it was doubtful whether the resources provided to the Committee each year were well used. Unless the Committee could become more productive and play a stronger leadership role, the biennialization of its meetings should remain under consideration.

34. One of the few specific recommendations made by the Committee on Conferences was the installation of signalling devices in conference rooms to enforce time-limits on speakers. Although his delegation did not oppose the measure, it could not accept the costly proposal put forward by the Secretariat in document A/47/287. The same results could be achieved at much less or no cost to the Organization. The General Assembly should therefore reject the Secretary-General's proposal and ask him to consider less costly means of controlling the length of speeches.

35. The report of the Secretary-General concerning the working methods, organizational structure and technological innovations in the Office of Conference Services (A/47/336) proposed only limited changes. That was a disappointing outcome, since an opportunity for achieving significant streamlining had been missed. Nevertheless, the report revealed major shortcomings in the management of conference resources.

36. The report outlined a number of problems affecting conference services, many of which were claimed to be beyond the control of the Office. The uneven distribution of meetings throughout the year and the late submission of poorly drafted documents by substantive offices were two of the external factors affecting the performance of the Office. The Office should make specific proposals to the General Assembly that would modify the calendar and even out the distribution of meetings. Intergovernmental bodies should not be allowed to set schedules that suited their particular interests, irrespective of the difficulties it might cause for conference services. The Office should develop and enforce new standards for the submission of documents by substantive offices. The chronic problem of late submission of documents could be addressed by ensuring that failures to meet deadlines were recorded in the evaluation reports of the officials responsible. Repeated failures should be grounds for denial of promotion or even dismissal.

37. The Secretary-General should take steps to improve utilization of interpretation services which was currently low because of frequent cancellation of meetings. Reductions should be proposed in the conference services allocated to bodies with poor utilization rates. In addition, the Secretariat should insist that more bodies meet on an "as available" basis, in order to take advantage of the services available as a result of the high rate of cancellation of meetings. That would reduce the number of interpreters needed and ensure better utilization of resources. The Secretariat should also implement new procedures to utilize more fully permanent interpretation staff at all duty stations, thereby reducing the amount spent on temporary staff.

(Mr. Bennett, United States)

38. A further reason for the late submission of documents was the current organization of editorial functions. The previous year's report on the subject had proposed only minor changes and was an example of the Secretariat's reluctance to make significant changes that would enhance productivity. Current problems were also related to questionable personnel decisions. Staffing in the office responsible for editing General Assembly documentation had been reduced by the transfer of staff to peace-keeping operations. While high priority must be given to peace-keeping operations, management must also take into account the possible negative impact the absence of certain staff could have on regular operations.

39. Staff shortages and lack of office space were cited as reasons for low productivity in the translation service. If the Secretariat believed that there were insufficient terminologists, then it should recruit those professionals by redeploying resources made available through the elimination of unnecessary or marginal jobs within the Office or the Secretariat as a whole. The Secretariat could also address the problem of lack of office space. Given that Secretariat staff had supposedly been cut by 12 per cent, more office space could have been allocated to the translation service.

40. The report did not deal adequately with the United Nations publications programme. Instead of proposing cutbacks in unnecessary publications, the report implied that the programme might be expanded. Paragraph 19 suggested that profits from the sale of publications could be allocated to the Sales Section to upgrade its activities. Such a proposal could be difficult to implement, given that the sale of publications produced losses estimated at almost $1 million in the 1992-1993 budget.

41. The section of the report devoted to technological innovations was also deficient in many respects. Overall, it would appear that the Secretariat was focusing on the acquisition of new, highly sophisticated technologies such as videoconferencing and machine assisted translation, despite the inadequacy of word-processing equipment. Paragraph 28 stated that resource constraints had made it necessary to introduce workstations in an uneven manner, and that the absence of a Headquarters-wide wiring infrastructure had impeded the movement of documents electronically. Those problems should be resolved before investing in more costly technologies which might not prove worth while. Nevertheless, his delegation would consider supporting the proposals for the acquisition of expensive office and telecommunications equipment, if the Secretariat could demonstrate that such investments were cost-effective. In the past, the Secretariat had not provided cost benefit analyses to justify its investment decisions; he hoped that any future proposals would include such information.

42. The report of the Secretary-General did not adequately address the question of workload standards. General Assembly resolution 45/248 requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to the forty-seventh session on the elaboration of unified workload standards for conference-servicing staff and

(Mr. Bennett, United States)

on progress made in the further development of such standards. Unfortunately, the list of documents for the Fifth Committee did not mention such a report. His delegation would appreciate a response from the Secretariat on the status of work in that area and on when the report of the Secretary-General would be issued.

43. The efficiency of the Office of Conference Services could and must be increased. While the recommendations of the Secretary-General and the Committee on Conferences were useful, they did not go far enough. The General Assembly should recommend that the review started in 1992 should be continued with the assistance of outside management experts. Future studies should focus on workload standards, technological innovations and investments, drafting and editorial functions, and document reproduction and distribution. In order to formulate a proposal, the Fifth Committee needed to receive as soon as possible the report prepared by the Management Advisory Service which might contain useful recommendations not reflected in the report of the Secretary-General.

44. His delegation was concerned that conferences and meetings had become an end in themselves. The proliferation of United Nations organs and bodies, the increasing length and complexity of agendas and the enormous volume of documentation had reached a point where progress on most critical issues was almost impossible. Member States had created that unmanageable situation and bore primary responsibility for finding a solution. It was time to take seriously the voluminous regulations governing conference services and resolve to implement them immediately. That would reduce the number of meetings held and documents produced.

45. All delegations must begin to consider whether calls for new conferences, meetings and reports were justified in view of the Secretariat's heavy workload. Funds spent on meetings and reports meant fewer services for the people the Organization was meant to serve, the citizens of Member States. The suggestion of the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management that no further world-wide conferences should be held until 1995 merited the full support of the General Assembly. Such conferences absorbed a very substantial part of the Organization's resources without necessarily providing significant benefits.

46. The General Assembly should request the Secretary-General to provide the Committee on Conferences with information on those committees, reports and services which, in his view, were wasteful, unproductive or had failed to meet expectations. Such information, together with proposals for corrective action, should enable the Committee on Conferences to submit recommendations to the forty-eighth session which would have a meaningful impact on the conference services budget.

47. The Assembly should also request each United Nations subsidiary organ to undertake, within the next two years, an in-depth analysis of its mandate in

(Mr. Bennett, United States)

order to determine whether it remained valid. Many United Nations bodies were no longer relevant to current political, economic and social conditions and should be abolished. The results of such reviews, together with recommendations, should be included, in the reports of each body to its respective intergovernmental body. The Secretary-General should also inform the Committee on Conferences of the progress achieved in that connection.

48. While Member States were largely responsible for the unfortunate state of affairs, the Secretariat must also accept its share of the blame. The Secretariat needed to exercise much stronger leadership in putting forward measures to enhance efficiency and eliminate much of the waste that characterized the intergovernmental decision-making process. In 1993, in the context of the further review of the conference service operations and in the light of the information requested from the Secretary-General on wasteful practices of individual committees, concrete proposals were expected that would make appreciable progress in reducing expenditures on that activity.

49. Unless the attitudes of Member States and the Secretariat towards the use of conference services changed, the United Nations would be unable to become the positive force for change which the world community demanded.

50. Mr. STAVRINOS (Cyprus) said that for the past few years the financial situation of the United Nations had been an ever-increasing problem and had inhibited the effective functioning of the Organization. Member States, Secretariat officials and collective bodies, in particular the Fifth Committee, must help find a solution to that problem.

51. Conference services were indispensable to the functioning of the United Nations and accounted for almost one fifth of the regular budget. Given the financial problems facing the Organization, it was most important that conference-servicing facilities be used in the most rational, efficient and cost-effective way. His delegation therefore supported the recommendations of the Committee on Conferences regarding the continued review of the Office of Conference Services in accordance with General Assembly resolution 46/190.

52. The question of documentation was of paramount importance for minimizing the excessive use of resources. Despite the application of technological innovations, which significantly improved the ability to produce documents, the ever-increasing demand regularly required additional resources. Within the Organization, the problem could be tackled by following the rules and regulations in force. The question of requests by Member States for communications to be circulated as official documents was different. Although Member States had the sovereign right to request circulation of their communications as official documents, that right should follow the relevant rules of international law and inter-State practice. In view of the Organization's grave economic difficulties and the common responsibility to contribute to their alleviation, Member States must adhere more strictly to the legitimate restrictions and limitations on their right to request the

(Mr. Stavrinos, Cyprus)

circulation of documents, among them the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council.

53. Some Member States, for their own policy reasons, continued to ignore the United Nations decisions and recommendations on documentation. That behaviour was even more provocative when those States abused their sovereign right by requesting the circulation of communications prepared by illegal entities or entities characterized by the Security Council as "legally invalid". Such a practice was also unfair to those Member States which respected the legitimate restrictions and exercised every possible restraint in order to assist the Organization in overcoming its financial difficulties.

54. It was time that the Joint Inspection Unit was requested to undertake a study of the translation, editing, printing, reproduction and circulation of United Nations documents and formulate specific recommendations.

55. The contribution of Cyprus to solving the problem lay in its strict adherence to the relevant resolutions and recommendations and its application of every possible restraint in the exercise of the right to submit documents. His delegation urged all Member States and the members of the Secretariat to abide strictly by the directives in force and to join in the common effort to lead the Organization out of its current financial difficulties.

56. Mr. RAZVIN (Russian Federation) said he shared the concern expressed by the Office of the Assistant Secretary-General for Conference Services and mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/47/1, para. 21) that the volume of available resources had not kept pace with the rapid expansion of the Organization's activities. The problem was particularly acute in the Office of Conference Services and vigorous steps must be taken to halt the rise in conference-servicing costs, within the context of the restructuring of the Secretariat and of the new tasks and requirements facing the Organization.

57. The Committee on Conferences should concentrate on regulating (and thereby reducing) the number and duration of conferences and meetings of United Nations organs; keeping tight control of the steady increase in the volume of documentation, which would mean carrying out an in-depth analysis of the usefulness of certain documents and the appropriateness of issuing them; coordinating conference activities and applying common sense to the use of the resources available throughout the United Nations system; implementing a sensible publications policy and evaluating the usefulness of certain publications from the standpoint of their cost to the Organization and their value to users.

58. The Committee on Conferences should be able to count on the strong support of the General Assembly, particularly the Fifth Committee, and should receive clear instructions in the context of resolutions on the agenda item in question.

(Mr. Razvin, Russian Federation)

59. In accordance with the biennial cycle of its programme of work, the Committee on Conferences had devoted particular attention in 1992 to documentation-related issues, which were of concern to many delegations since they involved the quality and timely submission of the documents that formed the basis of the work of the Committees of the General Assembly. Regrettably, the situation in that regard had not improved. He agreed with the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management that that situation should not be allowed to continue. Member States must work together to solve the problem of increasing documentation. The large volume of documents they produced overburdened the Office of Conference Services and resulted in the late issuance of poor quality documents. Member States should exercise restraint and circumspection in requesting conference services.

60. In general, the Committee on Conferences had examined those problems satisfactorily, and its report showed that it had done everything possible to analyse the document production process and pinpoint the factors that hampered document preparation and submission. None the less, some of the Committee's recommendations should be strengthened by increasing their specificity and defining their orientation more precisely. That was particularly true of the recommendations on the 32-page limit, on the six-week rule for the issuance of pre-session documentation and on the more efficient utilization of conference-servicing resources in general.

61. His delegation supported the idea of introducing comprehensive indices of the cost per hour of meeting time, and of bringing that information to the attention of the members of all United Nations organs. Such a measure would contribute to imposing discipline in the use of conference services and to obtaining considerable resource savings without compromising quality.

62. Continued efforts to achieve compliance with the 32-page limit would produce positive results. In that regard, it was necessary to take a close look at the work of a number of organs that received summary records and still continued to submit lengthy reports in excess of the 32-page limit.

63. He applauded the measures taken by the Secretariat to coordinate conference activities throughout the system in order to rationalize the use of the Organization's conference-servicing and human resources. However, it would be useful to have a better idea of the role played in that area by the Administrative Committee on Coordination, the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions and the Interagency Meetings on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications. The Secretariat should give close, constructive attention to the experience and possibilities of those mechanisms.

64. His delegation noted with satisfaction the approach taken in the report of the Committee on Conferences to the question of translation quality and the publication of documents. In view of the principle of the equality of all the official and working languages of the General Assembly, the Secretariat should

(Mr. Razvin, Russian Federation)

be asked to take steps to improve the quality of documents in Russian, which should accurately reflect the original texts. The Secretariat had highly qualified translators and editors for that purpose, and it would be a waste of its human resources not to use them for the benefit of the Organization. In that connection, his delegation also supported the idea, expressed in the statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management, of developing a better performance evaluation system, including a review of the complex and consequently inefficient rebuttal process. The Secretariat's administrative procedures in those areas should be made more flexible and his delegation supported the efforts of the Secretary-General in that regard.

65. His delegation supported the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee on Conferences regarding the review of the Office of Conference Services and thought that the report of the Secretary-General (A/47/336) was a constructive contribution to the ongoing analysis of the Office's structure.

66. Mr. VARELA (Chile) said that improving the meeting support system would help to facilitate the work of delegations, increase their efficiency and effectiveness and achieve the objectives of the Organization. Despite existing constraints, the Secretariat performed well, especially if one bore in mind the increased workload created by the revitalization of the role of the United Nations in international affairs and the lack of technological resources resulting from the budgetary difficulties that the Organization had been experiencing for a number of years.

67. His delegation endorsed the report of the Committee on Conferences and believed that maintaining the overall duration and annual periodicity of the Committee's sessions was very important if it was to fulfil the mandate given it by the General Assembly, although a biennial cycle might be adopted for certain items. It was also important to insist that the Secretariat take appropriate steps to ensure the timely distribution of the necessary pre-session documentation simultaneously in all the official languages. In addition, it would be a good idea if a report on the state of documentation could be distributed together with the annotated agenda for the session in question. Doing so would have an impact on the preparation of agenda items, the level of the discussions and the consequent effectiveness of contributions and suggestions.

68. It was necessary to reduce the number and overall volume of reports throughout the United Nations system. The pace of work at regular sessions made it difficult to read the documentation, which led to a waste of resources and time that must be avoided.

69. It also seemed logical to devote maximum attention to the Committee's recommendations and guidelines to the General Assembly with respect to encouraging all United Nations organs to use conference resources as fully and effectively as possible. That would require good planning and a responsible attitude on the part of the members of those organs. It was important that

(Mr. Varela, Chile)

subsidiary organs to consult the Office of Conference Services on the availability of resources before formulating or revising their recommendations on the dates or frequency of meetings.

70. Using an appropriate methodology to develop a notional cost per hour of meeting time that included all services involved would be most useful. That indicative amount, combined with the implementation of the Committee's recommendation to instal a system for signalling speech time-limits, would help to make the best use of the system's resources.

71. For the meetings and conferences of the United Nations to receive the required support, it was necessary to have not only balanced budgets and rationalized functions but also the capacity to provide logistical support for the work of delegations at the Organization's various headquarters. Developing that capacity was a very important, long-term task that, as it was gradually fulfilled, would contribute decisively to achieving the objectives of the United Nations. In that respect, the Organization could count on the cooperation of Chile and its delegation.

The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.